

Thomas Jefferson to Uriah Tracy, January 1806, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO URIAH TRACY.¹ J. MSS.

1 Endorsed: "(Not sent)."

Jan., 1806.

Sir, —I have received your letter of Dec. 31 wherein on behalf of a committee of the Senate charged to inquire concerning the characters and qualifications of Peter Walsh, Joseph Deville Bellechasse & others for the offices to which they are nominated you desire "that I will cause to be laid before them the proper information on the subject."

It is with real pain that I feel a difficulty in complying with the desires of a committee for whom I have the most unqualified respect. My nominations are sometimes made on my own knolege of the persons; sometimes on the information of others given either voluntarily, or at my request & in personal confidence to me. This I could not communicate without a breach of confidence, not I am sure, under the contemplation of the committee. They are sensible the Constitution has made it my duty to nominate; and has not made it my duty to lay before them the evidences or reasons whereon my nominations are founded: & of the correctness of this opinion the established usage in the intercourse between the Senate & President is a proof. During nearly the whole of the time this Constitution has been in operation I have been in situations of intimacy with this part of it & may observe from my own knolege that it has not been the usage for the President to lay before the Senate or a committee, the information on which he makes his

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nominations. In a single instance lately, I did make a communication of papers, but there were circumstances so peculiar in that case as to distinguish it from all others.

To this I must further add that a just solicitude to cover from all hazard that cordial good will which it is so vitally interesting to our country should ever subsist between its highest functionaries has led the two houses, as far as can be collected from their practice, to reserve to their own discretion alone to decide what official applications on their part shall be made to the President directly. It does not appear that that authority has been yielded to a committee.